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FROM INVISIBILITY TO NORMATIVITY: LGBT FAMILIES' REPRESENTATION IN  
PARENTING MAGAZINES

by

CLAIRE JAMES

Under the Direction of Katie Acosta, MA/PhD

ABSTRACT

This research compares the visibility of LGBT-parented families in the articles of two types of parenting magazines: Gay Parent Magazine, which targets LGBT families and Parents, which targets heterosexual two-parent families. I analyzed how the articles in each magazine portray LGBT-parent families, the articles' rhetoric, and how such language reinforces or deviates from heteronormativity. I compare the differences between how families are represented in Parents magazine and Gay Parent Magazine in order to illustrate how homonormativity is reproduced. Using a sociological lens, I address how the visibility of LGBT-parented families disrupts and conforms to hegemonic heteronormativity.

INDEX WORDS: Homonormativity, LGBT, parents, magazine, family, content analysis

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PARENTING MAGAZINES

by

CLAIRE JAMES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2019

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2019

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May 2019

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my chair Katie Acosta for the many revisions this took, and to Rachael Marie McCrosky and Joshua Simpkins for their beyond-words-help in my journey to this point emotionally and academically.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Heteronormativity, as defined by conformity to gender essentialism, as well as the socially anticipated masculine and feminine behaviors of each (Schilt and Westbrook 2009) facilitates my research on magazine portrayals of LGBT-parent families. I compared the increase in visibility of LGBT-parent families in the articles of two types of parenting magazines: an LGBT-based parenting magazine (*Gay Parent Magazine*) as well as a heteronormative-based magazine (*Parents*). I compare each magazine's portrayal of LGBT-parented families by analyzing the articles' rhetoric, and how such language caters to or deviates from heteronormativity. I elucidate the differences between familial representation in heteronormative parenting magazines and LGBT representative parenting magazines to define homonormative parenting and its divergence from heteronormative parenting. My research contributes to multiple areas in the field of sociology, including family, gender, and sexuality.

My research addresses the questions of how the visibility of LGBT-parented families disrupts and conforms to hegemonic heteronormativity, (the subscription to heterosexual-based parenting styles of the masses). I explore how the magazines' leadership, the article's author, the method of viewership (online publications vs. printed publications), and intended audience impact the content of these magazine articles.

I consider homonormativity in LGBT families' representations based on how heterosexual relationships are depicted and compare the nuanced aspects of compliance and rejection of heterosexual norms. I use a sociological lens for the analysis of online parenting magazine articles. I ask the following questions:

- 1) How has this visibility of LGBT-parented families emerged in *Parents* articles and how does it compare to the articles of a LGBT-based parenting magazine like *Gay Parent Magazine*?
- 2) Do LGBT parented families challenge or conform to heteronormativity through their media representations?

I use Karin Martin's model of "queer reading" in her article "Hetero-Romantic Love in Children's Films" (2009).

My research is informed by both queer theory and gender socialization theory. My use of queer theory comes from its original conception by Michael Warner. I borrow Chrys Ingraham's conceptualization of heteronormativity, "the view that institutionalized heterosexuality constitutes the standard for legitimate and prescriptive sociosexual arrangements," and her emphasis on the relationship between gender and heterosexuality in homonormativity in which "the material conditions of capitalist patriarchal societies are more centrally linked to institutionalized heterosexuality than to gender and, moreover, that gender (under the patriarchal arrangements prevailing now) is inextricably bound up with heterosexuality" (1994:204). Further, I follow Lisa Duggan's definition of homonormativity as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" and emphasis on how heteronormativity produces homonormativity (2003:179). For gender socialization, I draw from Candace West, Don H. Zimmerman, and Sarah Fenstermaker's explanation for the prevalence of heteronormative conformity (1987; 1995; 2009).

## 2 THEORY

### 2.1 Queer Theory

Queer theory is a sociological theory that builds on post-structuralist women's studies. Whereas the discourse was originally aimed at explaining lesbian/gay experiences, queer theory has since moved into a more complex understanding of fluid identities and behaviors (Seidman, 1996). In society, gender, sexuality, and identity are constructed as either normal or deviant performances. Subsequently, a dominant-subordinate power construct forms, where behaviors and identities that conform to the mainstream are celebrated, and transcendent behaviors and identities are frowned upon by society. It is then that "normal" identities become dominant, and "deviant" identities become subordinate, or seen as threatening to the "norm."

Drawing on classic work by Rich and Rubin, heteronormativity is defined as the process by which heterosexuality is assumed of all individuals, particularly families. This heterosexuality is then reinforced by social policies, institutions, and micro interactions, by catering to these assumptions. For example, current family and divorce laws mostly cater to heterosexual couples. Institutions like the media still focus predominantly on heterosexual unions and target the masses based on gender norms, assuming gender as something obvious. Because of the widespread acceptance of heteronormativity, it privileges those that conform to it. It also makes it difficult to imagine any other way of being.

Materialist feminism is a theoretical framework of feminism that systematically approaches topics such as class and government power on multiple levels (Ingraham, 1994). It also moves beyond gender as the premise in heterosexuality, and instead emphasizes capitalist underpinnings as the foundation of heteronormativity (Ingraham, 1994). Ingraham's work on the "heterosexual imaginary," a term the author coins to describe the taken-for-granted origin of

heterosexuality, confronts the pervasive authority of heterosexuality. Ingraham argues that although many sociologists have begun to understand gender as a social construction, the same has not been the case for heterosexuality. Instead, the author notes that heterosexuality is the premise upon which gender is constructed, and therefore itself is also a social construction. Instead, it is assumed, normalized, and prescribes socio-sexual relations. Ingraham argues that the heterosexual imaginary is a mask for heteronormativity, concealing its very construction, and hiding behind a gender dichotomy. Thus, heterosexuality is the key ingredient in gender.

Homonormativity is the assimilation to heteronormative ideals in same-sex unions (Duggan, 2003). Therefore, homonormativity reinforces heterosexual values as the norm, and discredits families that do not comply with heteronormative ideals.

Homonormativity establishes that all sexually non-conforming individuals share the common goals of heteronormativity. Under homonormativity, what is seen as normal, like conforming to one's ascribed gender, or performing socially in a way that mimics hegemonic masculinity or hegemonic femininity, is also seen as a social goal. Homonormativity suggests that queer individuals want to meet heteronormative standards. Thus, homonormativity strengthens heteronormativity. Resultantly, "normal" behaviors are rewarded, like getting married and having children.

All performances that are constructed according to social norms therefore become part of the dominant power. Queer theory asserts that there is room for ambiguity and evolving identities (Seidman, 1996). For example, transgender goes beyond the man/woman dichotomy, as bisexuality moves beyond the straight-gay dichotomy. Mainstream media tend to trap performances of gender, sexuality, and identity into very confined, binary categories (Butler,

1990). Foucault introduced the idea that the language regarding sex was never stifled, but evolved continually, even producing its own discourse and economy (Foucault, 1990).

In my research, I problematize the binary model of normal-deviant behaviors via queer theory to examine dominant/subordinate hierarchy in media. My research examines how homonormativity is socially constructed in the text of parenting magazines. I examine how heteronormative power is maintained through language and presentation in these articles. By using queer theory in my content analysis, I determine not just what is happening but *how* and *why*. This is because in media presentation is a performance; a way of socializing one's identity and role. Media content demonstrates power, masculinity, femininity, binary conformity, as well as a disruption to the system of ascribed statuses.

## **2.2 Gender Socialization**

Gender is widely accepted in sociology as a social construction that is separate from sex and not biologically innate. Specifically, gender is seen as an ongoing accomplishment, an idea that first appeared in its contemporary constructionist form with West and Zimmerman's "Doing Gender" (1987), an article rooted in symbolic interactionist, ethnomethodological, and feminist sociology. This approach sees one's gender roles as a work in progress, constantly shifting and undergoing change within a largely heteronormative schema, making role-language inadequate. For example, gender roles have changed across time. As one goes through life, the tendency is to conform to mainstream norms, in an ever-changing way.

Many works examine gender socialization, from birth, to childhood, to adulthood (Kane, 1993; Thorne, 2012; Pascoe 2007; Gerson, 2010). A variety of institutions act to imbue socialization, such as the home, family, school, speech, and even media as a socializing agent. West and Zimmerman broke ground initially in arguing for the idea that gender is not just



separate from sex, but an accomplishment (1987). Karin Martin's works highlight the significance of media as socializing agents (2009). Her work specifically focuses on how children are socialized through the media into dichotomous, heteronormative categories. She argues that it is through media, specifically G-rated movies, that children learn their imposed gender typifications, and that they mimic them in play. Specifically, her work goes beyond a simple "queer reading" to examine the ways in which heterosexuality is constructed and unpacks them to demonstrate their gendered and socio-sexual dynamics (Martin, 2009: 321).

My research looks at how gender socialization and homonormativity are reproduced through the media. Drawing on Martin's work on media as a gender socialization agent, I examine its resulting heteronormative profusion in my own theoretical analysis of parenting magazines.

### **3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **3.1 Homonormativity in Families**

Maintaining an identity as a queer parent in a largely heteronormative family system is challenging because heterosexuality is compulsory (Rich, 1993). Within this compulsion, sex, sexuality, and gender fall under a hierarchy of socially condoned behaviors (Rubin, 1992). This places reproductive heterosexuals at the top of this hierarchy, and stable gay and lesbian relationships on "the verge of respectability" below (Rubin, 1992:11). The outer limits of this hierarchy are occupied by queer, gender and sexually non-conforming individuals, whose behavior strays too far from the reproductive heterosexual realm (Rubin, 1993:12). This hierarchy creates imaginary boundaries in institutions that construct the idea that there is one best way to perform sex, sexuality, and gender and that everyone should be doing it this way (Rubin, 1993:12), being the cis-gendered heterosexual way.

Sullivan, (2004) finds that lesbian parents can reproduce heteronormative values when raising their children through gender socialization, the hobbies, toys, and gender display they encourage. Parents whose relationships disrupt heteronormativity still utilize “elements of heterosexual culture” in the socialization of the child (Sullivan, 2004:123). Other research has demonstrated that same-gender parents produce children who are less gender-stereotypical, compared to the children of heterosexual parents, (Stacey and Biblarz, 2001). Although the gendered dichotomy is less pervasive in LGBT families than heterosexual families, it still exists in cultural symbols such as appearance, activities, and performance.

Having children validates same sex family structures and their ability to conform to the larger culture (Landau, 2009). Still, “same-sex parenting is acceptable only if it generates properly masculine and feminine straight children” (Landau, 2009:82). Children can then become the measurement by which LGBT parents are evaluated for their abilities to conform (Landau, 2009:85). In a communications approach to the examination of same-sex parents in printed news media, Landau finds that “gay parents themselves are frequently overlooked in the articles as primary sources in lieu of narratives about, and from, their children” (2009:85-86). My research examines this focal point of article narratives.

In order to demonstrate the prevalence of homonormativity in LGBT-parent families, it is important to examine what maintains homonormative qualities, such as the focusing on heteronormative/heterosexual children in parenting articles. Through this focus, contradictions and continuities to homonormativity prevail. For example, the legalization of same-sex marriage leaves LGBT couples with the ability and expectation to conform to the same heterosexual emphasis placed on the importance of marriage in validating their families.

Marriage is a communicator of homonormative compliance. It in and of itself a signal of “belonging” or acceptance into a country such as the United States, which is saturated with an emphasis on legal bindings. (Chambers, 2001:308). For many in the LGBT community, marriage is a symbol of “hierarchy,” “dominance,” “subjugation,” and the path toward mass hegemony (Chambers, 2001:308). This is because it follows the pathways of an institution laden with historical patriarchy and capitalistic ownership as well as “ascribed roles and domesticity” (Chambers, 2001:308). With marriage comes ownership, entitlement, and control of property. These undertones act as signifiers of the overall purpose of marriage, rooted in oppression towards class, race, gender, sexuality, and the like. Because marriage is an institution grounded in heterosexual preservation, it is also grounded in tradition and heterosexual norms; hence, marriage becomes an additional signifier of heteronormativity.

Queer families both reify and disrupt heteronormativity (Sullivan, 2004). Sullivan argues that queer women who mother also conform to the heteronormative expectation of gender roles by following their maternal social roles. However, the ability to form families of choice by choosing partners and methods that no longer require or have the expectation of heterosexual practices as the only method of family building, has the potential to contest heteronormativity. For example, LGBT families can adopt or use donors for the creation of children. In creating families without men, women destabilize the patriarchal assumption that male presence is necessary. Further, because both partners are of the same gender, it eliminates the production of gender-based hierarchy “for with the emergence of lesbian-and-gay parent families in recent years comes the promising opportunity to explore how their practices, in principle free of historically produced, socially enforced gender conventions, might point the way toward the disconnection of gender and power, not only in their families, but in other societal arenas and

institutions” (Sullivan, 2004:6). Essentially, Sullivan argues that the power in LGBT families shifts and takes on a new, more leveled form.

Sullivan demonstrates that in same-gender parented families, the household division of labor is more egalitarian, where household roles are no longer based on gender socialization, but on assumed equality, as the heteronormative script of household tasks does not exist due to the absence of a need for two-gendered families (2004). Instead, the ability to make decisions rests equally on both partners, emphasizing a balance in power and authority, further demonstrating the ability of queer parents to destabilize heteronormativity. This is because “the social arrangements by which sexuality and procreation are organized do not honor the sociohistorical distinction made of reproductive anatomy” thus, “theoretically the power immanent in gender, and gender relations themselves will be profoundly disrupted” (Sullivan 2004:8).

Heteronormativity poses many power-based constraints on the LGBT family (Sullivan, 2004). Social norms deem gendered power as derived from one’s biological sex, which defines one’s distinction in society. These distinctions are always defined in relation to each other. Because the family is both the producer of gender (by way of socializing children into gendered roles) and also a reproducer of gender (by way of the parental roles within a family unit, which have already been prescribed by a gendered system), the power of gender and performing gender is most present in this institution of family (Sullivan, 2004). Particularly, women are defined in relation to men, and men benefit most from this distinction, consequently holding the most power in the family unit (Sullivan, 2004). This dimorphism organizes everything around two of the sexes. Because sexual orientation is predicated on the “male” and “female” sexes, “the significance of lesbian and gay-parent families in relation to gender and power has more to do with the gender of parents than with their sexual orientation” (Sullivan, 2004:7). If two parents

share the same gender, the family loses the prescribed relational power of gender between those individuals. This means that the power constraints that heteronormativity requires are seemingly absent. However, Sullivan also notes that “with the family itself mediated so much by and through other institutions, including mass media...it may make sense to begin thinking of the family-in-representation as more important than families in actuality in the production of gendered persons” (Sullivan, 2004:6). Here, Sullivan emphasizes the importance of gender production in family representation mass media. My research examines the representations of the production of gender among parents in these articles.

Despite the potential to queer the narrative of what parenting can look like, particularly for LGBT parents, queer identities in media are constantly pushed into visible, but still narrow representation when left in the hands of heteronormative control. Because of this narrow definition, a more fluid organization of family, one that represents choice more than tradition, lacks representation. Instead, the media present LGBT families as they do with nuclear families, with two parents and biological children. Jay Poole’s work in this area finds that although there is increasing room for non-heteronormative identities, “often, such alternative identities are fraught with their own rules and boundaries” (2014:280). These identities, which fall outside the stereotypical LGBT portrayals that are more common in media. Instead of borrowing a more individual array of behaviors, values, and attitudes that take pride in one’s identity, these portrayals depict difficult challenges filled with depression and anxiety because of an inability to conform to heterosexual norms or homosexual norms. Thus, the emphasis that media place on queer parents is based on homonormativity because society has still not allowed for a more nuanced depiction of LGBT individuals (Poole, 2014). As a result, homonormativity continues in

the form of being “spiritually natural, domesticated and family focused, monogamous, and static across the life course” (Mathers, Sumerau, and Cragun, 2018;936).

### **3.2 Gay and Lesbian Parent Scholarship**

Most scholarship on LGBT families centers on lesbians, at times failing to make the distinction between women who are in fact lesbian and women who might identify as bisexual (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Interestingly, just as lesbian mothers and their biological children dominate media presence, they also dominate the discourse on women who love and parent with other women (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Not only has research demonstrated that co-mother families have more egalitarian parenting methods, such as “high levels of shared employment, decision making, parenting, and family work,” but research has also shown that lesbian mothers aim to be equal to or surpass, heterosexual standards of egalitarianism in the form of “time spent with children, parenting skill, and warmth and affection” (Biblarz and Savci, 2010:481-482). However, this egalitarianism varies by race, class, and gender of children. In fact, adding children to lesbian relationships makes the sharing of household labor less egalitarian than among childless lesbian couples. Further the presence of children increases the tension in lesbian relationships as well as biological parent preference, in which a child “feels more positively about their biological mother than their co-mother” (Biblarz and Savci, 2010:483).

Sullivan (2001) argues that genetics are the most socially dominant link that attaches parents to their children and reinforces gender expectations of mothers. Laying claim to a non-biological child as a mother disrupts this idea as women are expected to be the child-bearers of their family as well as the sole or at least the only “legitimate” mothers of their offspring (Sullivan 2001:233). Having a biological child becomes a symbol of heterosexuality and is the more privileged parental identity for compliance with the heteronorm. Social mothers (non-

birthmothers) challenge the prevalent idea of what a mother can be in a heteronormative world. Hence, it is crucial in my study to examine how media expose the links of LGBT parents to their children. Presenting the children's genetic origins complies with heteronormativity as the media subtly addresses how the child came into being, regardless of its relevance to the articles' topic. In heteronormative families, the genetic origins of a child can be presumed. In LGBT families it is not, and the demand to know the child's birth origin stems from the emphasis on the heterosexual production of children. Looking at article topics and whether the article presents the child's genetic origins, however irrelevant, can be used as a measurement of homonormativity.

Beyond biology, research has also looked into the symbolic display of gender in LGBT families (Dalton and Bielby, 2000). The symbolic display of gender, which has previously defined the normative expectations in heterosexual couples, are "embodied in cultural assumptions and gendered relations [that] are the practical, material, and ideological notions that construct family" (Dalton and Bielby, 2000:36). These displays can also be found in the families of co-mothers, while still challenging heteronormativity (Dalton and Bielby, 2000). Challenging the gender norms of parenting requires a degree of individual agency on the parents' part, in which the parents must negotiate their parental roles with each other. While mothering adheres to the heterosexual emphasis on parenting as central to one's commitment to a relationship and gender identity, non-gestational mothers' social commitment to parenting challenges the heteronormativity of traditional family structures. These mothers must constantly contest cultural constraints of having no biological ties to their children as well as negotiate the division of labor and care-taking with their respective partners in a way that either mimics or challenges heteronormative family labor. My research looks for evidence of this self-conscious effort and negotiation in constructing one's parental identity homonormativity. Implicit and assumed roles,

such as the breadwinner-caretaker arrangement, or arrangements that resist egalitarian constructions of family, will consequently be seen as homonormativity.

Research on gay male parenting is a much more recent and growing field of study (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Similar to the scholarship on lesbian parenting, most of this research focuses on men who have biological connections to their children in either planned arrangements or through prior heterosexual relationships (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Much of the discourse surrounds the topic of challenging masculinity by way of gender norms and gay culture (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). The gay male parent dynamic is also fraught with prejudices, as men who wish to go extra lengths to procure children are labeled as pedophiles or homosexual child predators (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Most importantly, co-fathers share similar egalitarian divisions of household labor, like that of co-mothers (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). There is a major lack of research, however, that focuses distinctly on the children of gay and bisexual fathers (Biblarz and Savci, 2010).

Regardless, stabilizing the identity of a gay male father is particularly difficult, as parenting is socially constructed as a primarily maternal concept (Powell, 2012). The product of children in a male/male union again challenges the gendered idea of fatherhood. John C. Miller addresses the struggles of being a gay father (2001), reaffirming that legitimizing oneself as a parent of a non-biologically related child is a common struggle in LGBT families. Beginning with the emergence of the Gay Father Movement, which until 1997, had primarily consisted of men with biological children from prior heterosexual unions, many fathers struggled to legitimize their gayness. This is because the presence of a biological child itself suggests heterosexuality. Although adoptions by gay fathers are increasing, they still represent a minority of parental structures (Gates 2013). The representation of gay dads has its own unique obstacles,



such as an “inability to make the top of donation agency lists and navigating individually negotiated co-parenting relationships with women” (Biblarz and Savci, 2010:486). My research examines how they are portrayed in these magazines to evaluate homonormative compliance and the struggle to legitimize their selves as sexually non-conforming fathers to fill in this research gap.

In both lesbian and gay parent scholarship, there is an emphasis on masculinity and femininity in parenting (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Doing gender in a way that “reflects biology” reproduces the hierarchy of gendered and heterosexual behavior. For example, gestational mothering reflects the socially prescribed “natural” ability to perform traditional womanhood (Sullivan, 2004). This is different from manhood in that women are socially expected to be nurturers, and men are socially expected to be providers. Co-mothering, unlike heterosexual mothering, leaves room for the ability to share a nurturing role, or not. Adhering closely to more heterosexually dichotomous roles, rather than challenging them, makes the behavior of the individual more socially acceptable (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Because of this social acceptability, conforming identities are more privileged in their visibility. Even complimentary masculine and feminine identities in same-sex couples can still reinforce the heteronorm. My research examines these complimentary identities of a masculine-feminine relationship dynamic in LGBT parents to further assess this socially acceptable compliance within these magazines.

Scholarship on transgender and bisexual parents is almost non-existent (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Most of the discourse focuses on the individual nature of bisexuals and transgender people, as well as their experiences with their parents, but not as parents themselves. When bisexual men and women are studied as parents, they are lumped in either gay or lesbian parenting literature, depending on their gender (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Even if their

distinctions are noted, bisexual parents do not exist in their own area or study (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Additionally, the majority of this literature focuses on white, middle class families (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Therefore, one would expect to see a similar lack of representation of transgender and bisexual parenting in these magazines, as well as an overwhelming focus on white, middle-class families; This is a topic my results later address.

## 4 METHODS

### 4.1 Thematic Coding

First, drawing from queer theory and gender socialization, I performed thematic coding on existing data from the articles of *Parents* magazine and the nationally distributed LGBT parenting magazine, *Gay Parent Magazine*. Meredith Direct Media (MDM) is a marketing corporation that has over time bought out the rights to all of its parenting magazine competition, dominating the parenting magazine enterprise. The leading parenting magazine is *Parents* magazine.

MDM links all of the content of its parenting magazines to the Parents.com article storage, which can be accessed by the same search engine. Because of this, no distinction as to which magazine an article is from can be made between articles in the magazines' storage, as they are not presented with any attachment to a particular magazine in the search engine or in the articles themselves. Articles that have appeared in print are noted on the website; however, most articles featuring LGBT-parented families never appeared in print, which is why I used the web-based platform as data for the thematic coding instead of printed publications. *Gay Parent Magazine* is one of only a few independent but nationally distributed magazines.

I focus the analysis on the homonormative representation of LGBT parents in these two parenting magazines, using a coding scheme determined a priori to dissect the text used in these articles that specifically features LGBT parents on both media platforms. The objective of the analysis is to establish how homonormativity has emerged, is challenged or displayed within both media outlets. The coding scheme created was based on the literature reviewed, with attention to the symbolic nature of parenting methods, reproduction, and the editorial goals that could impact how homonormativity was challenged and displayed.

The criteria for this analysis included the editorial goals of these magazines, whether or not the author was mentioned, how these parents were presented with other parents, their identities, how language and pronouns were used to display gender, whose voices dominated the articles, (if they were members of the LGBT community or outsiders), if they brought attention to homophobia or ignored its existence, and in what ways these articles decided to incorporate the visibility of LGBT parents into their topics. Additionally, I examined the major themes that appeared in these articles, (parenting and reproduction), and developed appropriate sub-codes that dealt with those topics.

For parenting, this included how relationship status played a role in homonormativity, the how that homonormativity was challenged or conformed to among parents, attention to gender presentation of both children and their parents, the role of respectability politics at play in their selective representation, and the ways in which centrality surrounding children could mimic heterosexual goals. For reproduction, I looked at the ways in which a child's origins can be used to replicate homonormativity, how timelines of parenting can impact the hierarchy of representation and confer heteronormative values, the ways in which adoption and biological children can replicate homonormativity, and the effects of gender in LGBT reproduction. These themes were defined in terms of both their frequency, the topics they were presented with, and the editorial goals that impacted them. Due to the different audience of these magazines, one being predominantly heterosexual, and the other being LGBT parents specific, different themes appeared in each. However, all themes dealt with the topic of homonormativity.

## **4.2 Data**

MDM specifically aims its magazines at women, who represents approximately 85% of their audience profile. This corporation accounts for the majority of mainstream parenting

magazines, including the top five most circulated magazines in the United States based on audited numbers, *Family Fun*, *Parents*, *Baby Talk*, *American Baby*, and *Parenting* (Cision 2013). Its magazines have an intended heteronormative-mother based viewership, and thus focus on more heteronormative parenting, particularly in its printed editions. However, MDM also held an increasing web presence, with 13.5 million readers as of 2016, versus a 2.2 million print circulation (Meredith Direct Media, 2016).

*Gay Parent Magazine* is a LGBT-based publication that began in 1998. However, it is primarily distributed in print or via digital download with subscription fees (\$1.99 per back issue). Its website features only a limited number of articles to provide examples of their magazine's content to entice subscription. Hence, printed articles from this magazine will be used instead of online articles. *Gay Parent Magazine* is the only nationally distributed LGBT-parenting magazine available, with the largest viewership and the longest running distribution. According to the website:

60,000 copies of *Gay Parent* circulate each year, 10,000 copies of each printed issue is published six times per year with an estimated 20,500 readers per issue. *Gay Parent* is distributed in about 30 states in the USA, 64% northeast, 18% western, 12% central and 6% southeast. Copies are distributed mainly free of charge through LGBT community centers and bookstores. We also continually circulate and promote back issues through digital downloads and social media, (GayParentMag 2016).

*Gay Parent Magazine* articles will be used as the comparison in this research by providing the queer contrast to the homonormativity of MDM. Below is a comparison table for the magazines being utilized in this research<sup>1</sup>.

*Table 1 Comparison of Magazines by Demographics*  
**Comparison of Magazines**

<b>Demographics</b>	<b>Gay Parent Mag</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Family Circle</b>	<b>Family Fun</b>	<b>Pregnancy and baby</b>
Circulation	60,000	2,200,000	4,000,000	2,100,000	2,000,000
Readership	20,500	13,714,000	15747000	437000	4726000
Issues per year	6	12	12	8	11
Age	Range: 30-39	Median: 36	N/A	Median: 41	Median: 32
Household Income	Range: \$50,000-70,000	Median: \$57844	Median \$58,736	Median \$66,812	Median \$148,132
Own Home	60%	57%	74%	63%	43%
Sex Ratio F/M	45/50	85/15	91/9	86/14	88/12

Additionally, *Gay Parent Magazine* states of its readership:

Nearly all are college graduates, a third have household incomes of \$50,000 or more and nearly 20% have incomes of \$70,000 or more. Most readers are couples. Half of the readers who are couples have been together five or more years and a quarter of the readers are single. Most own their homes and almost all take one to three vacations per year with about a quarter taking four or more vacations per year. Almost all prefer to buy products and services from an openly gay-friendly business. Nearly 20% received a copy of *Gay Parent Magazine* from a friend or associate and almost half found Gay Parent Magazine online (GayParentMag 2016).

<sup>1</sup> The magazines *Baby Talk*, *American Baby*, and *Parenting* are all subdivisions of *Parents* magazine; thus, their demographics are not provided separately.

### 4.3 Sampling

I included any articles mention (however briefly) LGBT parents, such as gay and lesbian parents who are parenting alone or with their respective partners; any bisexual parents, (whether they are single parents, in heterosexual union, or same-sex unions); any prospective parents who are LGBT; and transgender-parented families. I included all LGBT-parenting articles published between January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017 from MDM's web-articles, and articles appearing in the same timeline from *Gay Parent Magazine*. The units of analysis in this research are MDM's online articles, and *Gay Parent Magazine*'s respective printed articles. The data were selected using purposive sampling. This is because these magazines are the most highly viewed of their respective demographics in the U.S. and thus the most comparable. Due to the niche topic of my research, the strength of this sampling technique lies in its ability to create a homogenous sample that will justify its theoretical, analytic, and logical generalizations about homonormativity.

The number of articles used differed for each set of data. *Parents* were selected by searching for any articles that uses the following key words: "lesbian", "gay", "same-sex", "LGBT", "trans", "transgender", "bisexual", and "homosexual". This resulted in 64 articles, which were uploaded to NVivo.

*GayParentMag* articles were selected using random sampling due to there being a larger selection of articles that appeared regarding these topics within the same timeline. Because 64 articles were all that was available from the *Parents* online archive, 64 were chosen from *GayParentMag*. First, all magazines published between the same dates were downloaded from the publicly available *GayParentMag* website. This resulted in 36 magazines. To make sure each magazine was utilized at least once for an even time-spread, a magazine would be selected, and a

randomly selected article was chosen from inside. Once a magazine was selected, all articles that were secretly advertisements were eliminated. This was a common feature of *GayParentMag*. For example, many “articles” were disguised as vacation ads, ads for children’s camps, or children’s school. Some were explicitly labeled as ads, while others were not. The line between ad and article was not always clear, but if the writing spoke more to LGBT family issues than hotels or restaurants, it was considered an article. Once the number of articles was determined for a magazine, a random number generator was used to select an article based on the number of articles in an issue. They were then uploaded into NVivo.

After I had used at least one article from each Gay Parent Magazine collected, I used the same random number generator to select an issue, then an article inside that issue until I had the same number of *GayParentMag* articles as I did for *Parents*. If the generator selected an article twice, I regenerated a number. For example, if the random number generator selected the 28<sup>th</sup> issue, and inside that issue there were 6 articles, and the generator selected article number 4, which had previously been selected in the first round, a new number would be generated until it produced a number other than 4. Sometimes an issue was selected 3 times, while others may have only been selected once. Some issues also had many articles, while others only contained a few. This meant that in some cases, every article in an issue ended up being uploaded, while others may have only had 1 of their 7 articles uploaded. Regardless, all articles were chosen as random until 64 articles had been selected and uploaded into NVivo.

#### **4.4 Measurement**

To measure LGBT family visibility, I examined homonormativity and the presentation of families, gender, sexuality. This appeared within the context of three major categories: Editorial Goals, Parenting, and Reproduction. Under these categories, I placed the coding themes that



were associated with them. Text that highlighted these coding themes were organized under their subscribing thematic categories and analyzed. The themes that were determined a priori based on the literature included the authorship of the magazines, the intended audience of each articles, how LGBT parents were presented with other parents, their LGBT identities, the gendered language LGBT parents used to refer to each other, who was speaking in these articles, their recognition of existing homophobia for LGBT parents, their relationship statuses, the presentation of statements that adhered to or challenged homonormativity, the gender presentation of both children and their parents, and the children's origins. Other themes that appeared later during my research included how LGBT parents were mentioned either in passing or for newsworthy topics and revelations, the respectability politics that these families demonstrated, their child-centricity within their parenting narratives, the timelines of their parenting in conjunction with their outness, the ways in which adoption was portrayed, how biological children were portrayed in particular, as well as the gendered dynamics surrounding rhetoric among sperm donorship. These themes were then measured in terms of their frequency both in terms of the frequency of references overall, and in terms of how many articles used these themes. Finally, these themes were assessed under their magazine's demographic.

## 5 RESULTS

The following results were divided into three main thematic categories: Editorial Goals, Parenting, and Reproduction. Each code examined fell under one of these three topics. Editorial goals primarily examined the decisions made by the magazines in regard to content. Parenting codes dealt with the act of parenting, and Reproduction codes dealt with matters pertaining to reproduction.

## 5.1 Editorial Goals

This theme pertains to codes that dealt specifically with the presentation of content in magazines. The following codes represent the ways in which LGBT parents were presented: Authorship, Intended Audience, Presentation with Other Parents, LGBT Identity, Gendered Language, Voice, Calling Out Homophobia, and In Passing.

### 5.1.1 Authorship

The code “Authorship” was created to distinguish between authors whose names were boldly published, and authors whose names were hidden. This coding scheme was created to analyze the magazines ability to attribute their articles to accountable authors, rather than ghost writers whose identities remained closeted. Both magazines mentioned the author of most articles; only 2 *Parents* articles and 4 *GayParentMag* articles did not. Originally, I thought *Parents* might not link their articles to authors in the way *GayParentMag* would due to different target audiences. This belief did not bear out. However, as the code “Voice” shows, this was in large part because the authors who were listed in *Parents* were not necessarily a part of the LGBT community, and such articles that did give voice to LGBT parents, did not reveal their identities.

### 5.1.2 Intended Audience

The code “Intended Audience” deciphered whether LGBT parenting articles were being directed at both heterosexual and LGBT parents, just LGBT parents, or just heterosexual parents. If a code offered advice to heterosexual parents on explaining LGBT families to their children, for instance, it was marked as having a heterosexual audience, unless it was an article aimed at how to explain your own LGBT family to your own children, in which case it would be marked for an LGBT audience. Sometimes articles were marked as both. For example, articles that

explained fertility options and how to route them as heterosexual parents or LGBT parents would be marked this way. This code was to get an idea of whether or not LGBT parents were being casually considered alongside heterosexual parents or explained to heterosexual parents in a way that singled them out, or even to address LGBT parents themselves in a way that considered them to be a niche demographic.

Both or unspecified audiences were addressed in 29 articles, LGBT parents were specifically addressed in 2 articles, and heterosexual parents were addressed specifically in 10 articles. As these findings show, articles addressed both or an unspecified audience, rarely addressed LGBT parents directly, and ¼ of the time referenced specifically heterosexual parents in articles meant to inform them on the social formalities of interacting with LGBT parents. The articles addressed to both audiences ranged in theme, and the only 2 articles specifically directed at LGBT parents were articles on explaining one's family, and another that offered adoption tips specifically for same-sex couples.

### **5.1.3 *Presentation with Other Parents***

I designed one code, only relevant for *Parents*, that explored who LGBT parents were presented with; Either in conjunction with heterosexual parents or presented individually. I only used this coding for *Parents* because *GayParentMag* only portrayed LGBT parents. This code fell into two categories: "In Conjunction with Heterosexual Couples" and "Individually Presented." Sometimes LGBT parents were presented alongside other celebrity parents who adopted, or in an article about potential roadblocks in the adoption process.<sup>2</sup> This coding scheme allowed for an examination of the circumstances leading to *Parents* spotlighting LGBT parents.

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<sup>2</sup> A limitation to this coding is that since only LGBT parent articles were selected to be coded, this did not account for all the times LGBT parents were excluded from potentially applicable parenting articles because those articles were not brought into the comparison.

LGBT parents were presented alongside heterosexual parents 10 times and presented individually 15 times. The articles that referenced LGBT parents in conjunction with heterosexual parents largely focused on “how to” navigate the difficulties of adoption and fertility treatment options. There were, however, some notable exceptions, including such as an article that discussed the changing American family with attention to same-sex parenting (Beam), an article featuring straight parents answering rude questions gay parents were all too familiar with (Willets), and another article featuring celebrity moms who adopted children of multiple sexual orientations (Rosen and Rueb). In these articles placing LGBT parents alongside heterosexual parents normalized them as well as challenged heteronormative subscription.

The 15 references made to individually presented LGBT parents focused on homophobia/LGBT insensitivity, popular news stories, and explanatory articles directed at heterosexual parents. Thus, this code was highly dependent on the theme of the article. For example, the article “9 Things You Should Never Say to a Gay Dad” (Taylor, n.d.) focused on homophobia and insensitivity to LGBT parenting, whereas the article “This Lesbian Couple’s Cute Pregnancy Announcement is Going Viral” (Dubin, n.d.) exemplified popular news stories featuring LGBT parenting, and the article “Why I Love being a Lesbian Mom” (Aizley, n.d.) exemplified explanatory articles that are directed at heterosexual parents.

Although there were more references to LGBT parents presented individually as opposed to in conjunction with heterosexual parents, it is still interesting to note that these articles largely were created for a heterosexual audience. Ultimately, the themes addressed in articles with LGBT parents did not demonstrate homonormativity because they did not single them out in a tokenized fashion or present them in any way that was inappropriate with the article’s topic. Instead, these articles normalized their appearances as another way of parenting.

### 5.1.4 *LGBT Identity*

Women were more often presented as parents than men. The majority of LGBT parents presented fell under the category of either lesbian or gay in both magazines.<sup>3</sup> In *Parents*, the majority of parents featured were lesbian, roughly 55% (18 parents) of all the parents in fact belonged to that category. Gay parents appeared in *Parents* 39% (13 parents) of the time; Bisexual parents appeared 3% of the time (1 parent), and transgender parents appeared 3% of the time (1 parent). The bisexual parent in *Parents* was the only parent coded twice to account for their change in sexual orientation, in which both being gay and being bisexual were a large part of their identity for an extensive time. To quote this parent directly:

I really believe I was bisexual then, and it wasn't something that was all-consuming. But over the years, my sexuality became much more a part of who I was. For many years, Jill and I viewed it as a piece of me that we had to deal with, but I think we both silently knew over time that it was becoming a bigger piece of me. (Brown, n.d.)

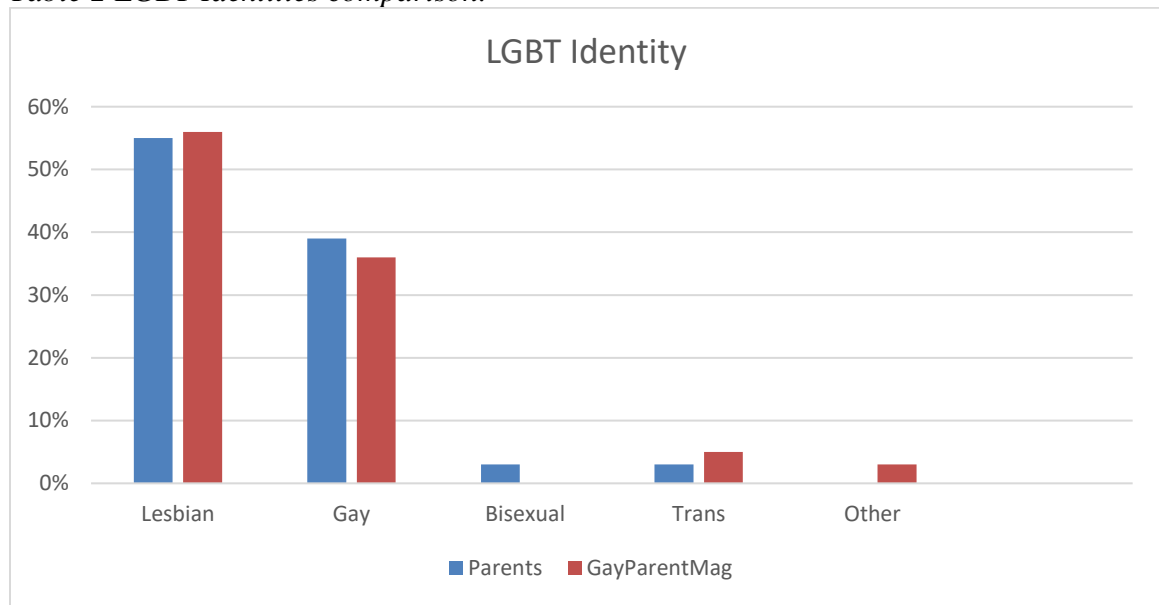
Reese, the transgender man mentioned earlier, is the only transgender parent represented in *Parents*. Notably, his identity as a trans man fits cleanly into a gender binary.

Ultimately these findings suggest *Parents* leans towards simple representations of LGBT parents' sexual identities, with more directly identified individuals, and parents whose identities fit neatly into a gender binary than those that transcend it.

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<sup>3</sup> If sexual orientation was not explicitly stated but presumable by way of presentation with a partner or other parents than they were coded under the "presumably" category. Direct mentioning of being Gay or Lesbian was coded as "directly." The tables featured do not reflect this distinction and group these two categories together. The other category was used when no context clues were present or there was a complete lack of information.

Table 2 *LGBT Identities comparison.*



In *GayParentMag* lesbian identities are overwhelmingly represented (56% or 49 parents), with gay parents making up the second largest category (36% or 31 parents). *GayParentMag* also features no bisexual parents, and roughly 4 transgender parents that account for 5% of all LGBT parents represented. The percentages are similar to *Parents*, but one must also consider that *GayParentMag* features a larger number of LGBT parents (more than twice as many, 87:33). The category “other” has 3 references to parents with an indeterminable sexual orientation. Interestingly, as this chart demonstrates, *GayParentMag* has fewer clear references to the sexual orientation identity of parents than *Parents* does. The underrepresentation of bisexual and transgender parents in these magazines may be due to how their existence disrupts the “limitations of homonormativity” (Mathers et. al, 2018). That is because bisexuality breaks the “monosexist assumptions embedded in homonormativity” (Mathers et. al, 2018;947) and transgender existence calls into question the ‘cishnormativity’ necessary for homonormativity. This is because heteronormativity is clear cut. It does not possess fluidity, whereas the nature of

transgender and bisexual individuals does. This is not surprising given Rubin's (1992) research, which shows that because these identities are more fluid and non-conforming, they fall into a lower hierarchy of social respectability.

In terms of the visibility of bisexual and transgender individuals, "even when sociologists have turned their attention to the limitations of homonormativity, we have generally focused on consequences such strategies have for existing racial, cisgender, familial, religious, marital, and economic patterns while leaving the consequences of homonormativity for transgender and bisexual communities mostly unexplored" (Mathers et. al, 2018:948). With such little media representation, it is hard to explore these identities more fully. At the same time, their very underrepresentation outlines the homonormativity still fraught in both *Parents* and *GayParentMag*.

### 5.1.5 Gendered Language

I analyzed the language LGBT parents used to refer to each other as another measure of their homonormativity. This code was used to examine and differentiate between language that used gender specificity, (such as husband, wife, she, he, etc.) and language that didn't (they, partner, spouse, etc.)

In *Parents*, gender-neutral language was used to reference LGBT parents 10 times, and gendered language was used to reference LGBT parents 21 times.<sup>4</sup> *GayParentMag* reproduced nearly-identical results, with 12 "gender-neutral" and 24 "gendered" references to LGBT parents. Both magazines used gendered language when referring to LGBT parents twice as much

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<sup>4</sup> This count did not account for repetitive use of language to refer to one family, unless it was by another partner or other voice, but was only coded if it was the general use of the LGBT parents (like "her" or "wife"), or if it was used to refer to LGBT parents as a whole, (like "lesbian mothers").

as gender-neutral language. Gendered Language allows sexually non-conforming parents to better place themselves in dominant parenting dialogues. This language also conforms to homonormativity by maintaining a gender binary and heteronormative values. As Ingraham (1994) showed, gender and the language surrounding it is built on the very foundation of heterosexuality. Its prevalence speaks to the “assimilation to dominant systems of societal inequality and the marginalization of abnormal others” (Mathers, et. al, 2018;936).

### 5.1.6 Voice

I created the code “Voice” to examine who was informing the audiences at hand. I then divided this code into 3 sub-categories, “Member” in which an LGBT parent was allowed to speak for themselves, “Outsider” in which a heterosexual author spoke on behalf of LGBT parents, and “Professional” in which a person considered a professional in terms of psychology, surrogacy, law, etc. who speaks on behalf of the community.<sup>5</sup>

I only used these codes in *Parents* since all articles in *GayParentMag* were, due to the nature of their magazine, written for and by LGBT parents. In *Parents*, articles written by complete outsiders had a slight majority (total of 33 references in 28 articles), while voices of members of the LGBT community were presented 24 times, and professionals having the same total of references. This is interesting considering that 29 of the articles coded were written for an either unspecified audience or written for one that included both LGBT parents and heterosexual parents.<sup>6</sup> Still, the bulk of articles (28 out of 64) were written by outsiders, which is problematic considering that LGBT parents were not given the chance to speak as authors on behalf of their own community. Dialogue controlled by not only heterosexual media

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<sup>5</sup> Multiple categories were selected whenever necessary.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that sometimes these articles contained the voice of multiple coding categories and were subsequently coded to reflect this.



corporations, but also heterosexual individuals does not leave room for marginalized voices. Even the articles written specifically for heterosexual audiences mostly gave voice to professionals speaking on behalf of the LGBT community in addition to outsiders of the LGBT community. Eliminating LGBT parents' voices from the dialogue privileges a hetero-lens even on topics unrelated to heterosexual populations.

### **5.1.7 *Calling Out Homophobia***

Voice was an important consideration in other ways as well. The coding category “Calling Out Homophobia” was created to capture references that used voice as a way of restoring justice to LGBT parental identities. Whenever an article mentioned the trials and tribulations of the LGBT community, those references were coded under this category.

These references came from both magazines and half of all substantive articles in both. I coded references that drew attention to homophobia. For example, “9 Things You Should Never Say to a Gay Dad” (Taylor, n.d.): “Stereotypes are the result of ignorance. Even the most accepting, progressive person can depend on a stereotype without knowing it.” References like this one occurred in *Parents* 16 times, and in *GayParentMag* 55 times. *GayParentMag* had more than three times as many references that called out homophobia. It is attention to the issue of homophobia that is key in breaking the homonormative narrative, because it acknowledges how it is privileged.

### **5.1.8 *In Passing***

Almost 1/3 of the articles coded in *Parents* did not produce many codes at all because they simply mentioned LGBT parental identities in passing, rather than directly focusing on those identities. For example, an article in *Parents* mentions raising a child to respect people with a variety of backgrounds, including (but not specifically) sexual orientation (Whittemore,

n.d.). The article “New York State’s Definition of ‘Parent’ Just Changed for the First Time in 25 Years” (Willets, n.d.) mentions a court case originally brought about by two lesbian couples, but does not specifically discuss those couples, merely the new dilemma of who counts as a legal parent. The article “Strange Sex Dreams During Pregnancy” (Robinson, n.d.) focuses on a reader concerned with her recent same-sex sexual encounters while dreaming, in which an “expert” assures her that she is not actually gay, and that her dreams are meaningless and influenced by hormonal changes resulting from pregnancy. As these examples show, each article under this code had but one similarity that caused them to come up in search engine results: they mentioned LGBT parents in passing with no actual specific presentation of LGBT parents or issues related directly to being an LGBT parent. Thus, while some coding categories have small numbers of references, it is important to recognize that this is in part due to 18 of these files mentioning LGBT parents in briefly or abstractly.

#### **5.1.9 *Newsworthy***

Many passing references to LGBT parenting evaded substantial parental visibility because they did not focus on specific LGBT parent narratives. These articles primarily discussed revelatory knowledge, such as a new medical service, the death of an LGBT person of notoriety, or a change in social policy for LGBT people. This demonstrates that the LGBT parental appearances are more likely to be presented in a newsworthy fashion to a predominantly heterosexual audience. In this way, LGBT parental appearances are pushed further into the arena of hetero-fascination, highlighted by articles regarding whether or not it is appropriate for Perez Hilton, a gay man, to shower with his son, or revelations such as to the brain waves of gay fathers as functioning similarly to heterosexuals moms and dads, as well as multiple articles discussing the same viral pregnancy announcement picture from a “sweet” lesbian couple. Often

these articles contained phrases that hinted at the obvious legitimacy these families already held to its largely straight authors (a topic further dissected later in this thesis), like “According to a new study, same-sex parents are just as capable as opposite-sex parent couples at raising kids” (Becker, n.d.). However, the thematic nature of their content still placed these parents on a pedestal of speculation by heterosexuals regarding LGBT parenting abilities, rather than placing them on the same platform of actual parenting challenges and narratives. This occurred 30 times in the 64 articles coded in *Parents* and was a phenomenon that was understandably absent from *GayParentMag* entirely.

## 5.2 Parenting

Seventeen articles from *Parents* and forty-four articles from *GayParentmag* dealt primarily with the challenges or narrative of parenting. Key thematic codes to this category included: Marital Status, Queerness vs. Conformity, Gender Presentation of Child, Gender Presentation of Parents, Respectability, and Child Centricity. This section begins with how parental configuration played a role in these narratives, how they conformed and diverted from heteronormativity, the gender presentation of these families, the respectability politics these narratives took on, the child-centric nature they often surrounded.

### 5.2.1 Relationship Status

The marital status of the LGBT parents featured in these magazines were nuanced.<sup>7</sup> These categories were most often explicitly stated by the parent’s themselves. When they

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<sup>7</sup> I coded the status that best summarize a parent’s marital status while parenting. For those that had multiple statuses of great significance, multiple categories were highlighted. Short term transitory statuses were excluded as they did not represent the most predominant LGBT upbringings of the child/children in question. For example, some parents came out shortly after the birth of their children and met a partner they ended up with for the next 14 years till present after less than a year of being single.

weren't stated and there was no context for their arrangement, I placed parents in the "Unspecified" category. In *Parents*, married parents were referenced 10 times, single parents were referenced twice, unmarried parents were referenced only once, and the rest were unspecified. I created a category for parents who were explicitly referenced as not being married, the only couple coded as such was presented in an article that discussed that marriage was not (at the time) legal in their state, as that article was written before same-sex marriage was legal nationwide. I coded parents under whichever status was echoed most strongly in the article, and never twice.

Although one would presume that marriage would be more prominently referenced as a symbol of homonormativity in *Parents* magazine, it was not. Marital status was instead not often mentioned at all. This could have been incidental, as many of the articles in *Parents* referenced LGBT parents only in passing, or as potential readers of its articles on reproductive options, with few articles actually portraying detailed LGBT parent's lives.

Regardless, *GayParentMag* had a much larger emphasis on married LGBT parents. I coded references to married parents whenever a wedding was mentioned, or the words "husband" or "wife." Married couples were referenced 41 times, single parents were referenced 9 times, unmarried parents 10 times, and unspecified marital statuses occurred 16 times.

Additionally, I created an additional category only for *GayParentMag*, "Striving for Marriage," to reflect the unique circumstances of some couples featured in earlier magazine articles, who were unwilling to settle for a commitment ceremony, or being unmarried. To put them in any other category would ignore the context of their situations, so this category was created to respect those circumstances.

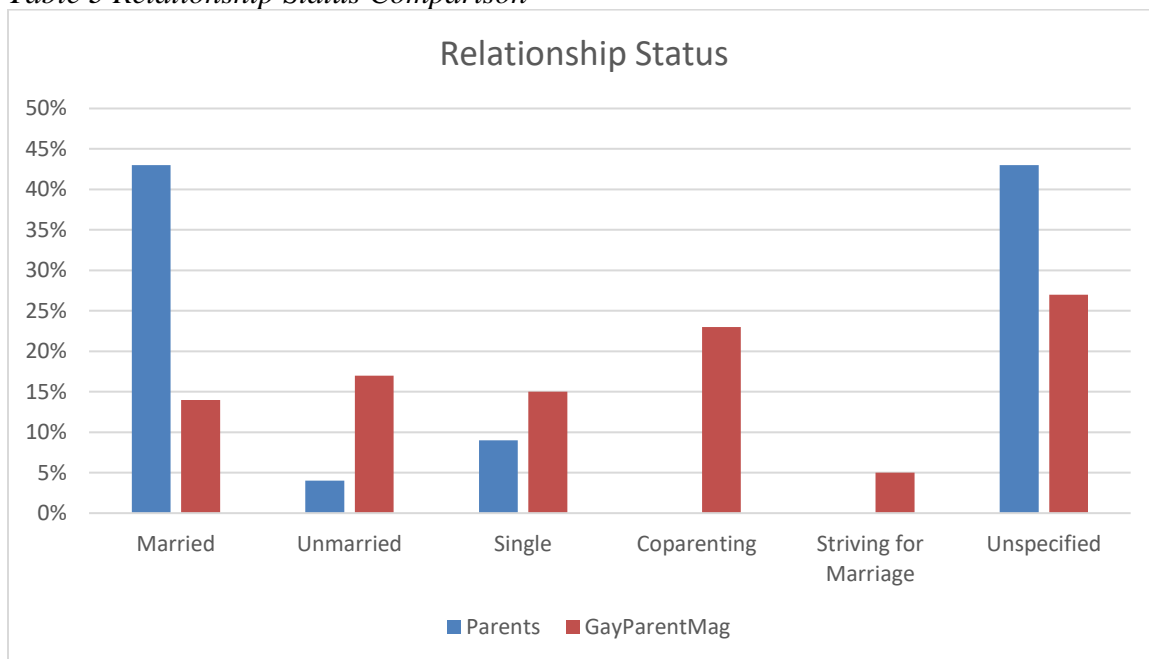
Many of the LGBT parents featured in *GayParentMag* referred to themselves as co-parents, so I created a co-parent category to reflect the parents who opted to have children with friends or had dissolved heterosexual partnerships. It should be noted that co-parents were not coded twice under the marriage coding, and were not counted as single parents, since the two single parents referenced were entirely solo in their act of parenting, and these parents were actively parenting with others.

These two additional categories reflect the unique complexity of LGBT parenting found in *GayParentMag*. It is not simply the status of being married that speaks to what a family is, but the intentions surrounding it. For example, an LGBT parent couple fighting for marriage in their state demonstrates complacency with the value of marriage. Additionally, when two friends opt to co-parent, they remind us that marriage and its ties to sexual attraction and romantic attraction do not always have to be synonymous with choosing parenting. It also reflects the idea that parenting can occur among more than two individuals. Take for example the following passage from *GayParentMag*: “One of his mom’s has two children from a previous marriage. So, rather quickly these two kids, two lesbian moms and their extended families all became part of the life my (at that time) partner and I had built together.” (Serrett, 2017:35). Here, we see that family has the potential to shift, change, and be grounded not in marriage so much as love. This complicates the nuclear narrative of a clear transference of family lineage. Representation like this makes *GayParentMag* unique.

In total, Co-Parenting was referenced 14 times, married parents were referenced 41 times, single parents were referenced 9 times, striving for marriage was referenced three times, unmarried parents were referenced 10 times, and unspecified parental statuses were referenced

16 times. As the charts below demonstrate, there relationship status spreads considerably in *GayParentMag* compared to *Parents*.

*Table 3 Relationship Status Comparison*



Although there are almost 4 times as many references to being LGBT married parents in *GayParentMag*, this does not neatly embrace the homonormative inclination towards marriage and concise, nuclear definitions of family. In fact, the concept of family broadens and shows diversity in representation. The large “Co-Parenting” category demonstrates that families need not be held together by the heteronormative sanction of marriage, but more so by the decision to parent. The shape-shifting nature of the definition of family then becomes complicated, a theme that will be revisited in “Parenting Timeline.” As this chart shows, *GayParentMag* does not show conformity to the homonormative narrative in this regard. Even *Parents* magazine, which has a much larger emphasis on marriage as a discrete category, does not always reveal the nature of the relationship between its featured parents. Still, *Parents* does not offer up less discrete

forms of relationships, just married, or unacknowledged. This falls in line with Rubin's (1992) findings that the social respectability of gay and lesbian relationships relies on their stability.

### 5.2.2 *Queerness Vs. Conformity*

Another theme of homonormativity that was explored were references to both queerness and to conformity by LGBT parents themselves. Not every article made references to either of these, especially if the article did not specifically feature an actual parenting narrative or an LGBT voice. These references were categorized based on their adherence either to intentional straying from heteronormativity ("We're Here, We're Queer") or to their intentional replication of it ("We're Just Like You"). "We're Here, We're Queer" references often exuded pride, and an affirmation of their identities as being normal despite their stressed differences. For example, the *Parents* article regarding pride in gay fatherhood states:

When she grows up and falls in love with someone, I want her to be proud of that love. I want her to reach out and take that person's hand without fear or shame. The best way to help her be proud of her feelings is to show her that I'm proud of mine. (*Parents*, n.d.)

This reference emphasizes the stress put on pride of difference and normalization of these differences. Alternatively, "We're Just Like You" references emphasized parenting that mimicked heterosexuality. For example, in the *Parents* article "9 Things You Should Never Say to a Gay Dad" one parent attempts to publicly affirm their hetero-masculinity in raising their gender-conforming daughter:

Everybody knows that gay men are fab-u-lous, down to their Italian loafers and leather satchels, right? Except when they're not. I know plenty of gay guys whose fashion sensibilities are limited to T-shirts and jeans. Including myself. For me, stylish is when I don't wear black shoes with brown socks. Luckily, my daughter's fashion sense is

evolving without any help from me. It's not that I don't try to offer my input when she's getting dressed. But the last time I tried, I said something like: 'Hey, you should wear that purple shirt with those embroidered jeans! That would look good, right? Right?' I received a raised eyebrow and skepticism from her. 'Yeaaaaah, I could do that,' she said, 'if I were clueless.' (Taylor, n.d.)

Taylor tries to affirm his likeness with heteronormative dads in emphasizing not just his inability to be "fashion sensible" but in his ability to raise a gender conforming daughter who complies with heteronormativity. His difference should be accepted as normal, instead, his ability to achieve heteronormative children makes him accepted as normal.

"Queerness" was presented in *Parents* 6 times, and "Conformity" was coded in *Parents* 20 times. This was the inverse of *GayParentMag* which presented the code "Queerness" 21 times, and "Conformity" 13 times. As this shows, there was a higher volume of both types of references in *GayParentMag*, which was largely due the higher volume of actual LGBT parents given room for a voice in articles featuring them.

### **5.2.3 Gender Presentation of the Child**

*Parents* did not contain any references to non-conforming children. It did however reference gender-conforming children 3 times. These references included mentions of gender typical interests and heterosexuality, or rather, when a child proves to be "just like the other children."

For example, the following passage comes from the article "Why I Love Being a Gay Dad":

Having awkward talks about boys. Daughters are supposed to feel awkward talking about boys with their fathers, and I'm sure mine will avoid the topic like the plague as she gets



older. But for now, she's pretty darn comfortable talking with me about whom she's crushing on. More interesting, she enjoys asking me uncomfortable questions about boys. During one of our weekly Saturday-night action movie fests at home, she turned to me with a mischievous grin and asked, "So, Daddy, which of the Avengers do you think is the cutest?" (Parents, n.d.)

In this passage, the author describes his daughter as a relatable child with heterosexual interests. This is reaffirmed by the statement "Daughters are supposed to feel awkward talking about boys with their fathers." In this statement, heterosexuality is just as implicit as the gender roles of father and daughter, as the author presupposes his daughter moving into a future phase of confidential romantic interests and a division of openness between gendered family roles.

*GayParentMag* presented gender-conforming 6 times, and gender non-conforming children were presented 3 times. 5 out of the 6 references to gender conforming children regarded boys. Two references were made to raising girls (one reference contained a son and daughter). These references mostly discussed gendered children's interests. The parents who portrayed their children as such generally seemed in favor of these interests, like in the following passage from the article "Camping with Kids":

Yes, camping for us has... evolved, but not in a way that lessens its value. Here's why: our boys are learning to camp at an age where they're absorbing every experience like energetic little sponges. Instead of attending French camp or play dates, watching Netflix or playing on the iPad, our boys are roughing it. Like we used to when we were boys, and our dads before us. They're out there exploring waterways and forests like our ancestors did. (Hurtubise, 2015:22)

As this passage demonstrates, the parents here are pleased with passing on traditional experiences to their children. They enjoy socializing their boys into an experience of “roughing it,” and passing on that experience the way their fathers and ancestors always have. Only one parent described discontent toward the implicit heterosexuality their son displayed when playing with gendered toys, as this passage from *Parents* demonstrates:

The other day, Grandpa bought Kody a couple of Kermit and Fozzy dolls from the Disney Store. My wife Amy, pretending the two dolls were excited to know they were going home together, had Kermit kiss Fozzy. Without missing a beat, my beautiful, sweet, innocent 4-1/2-year-old son said, "Fozzy's not a girl!" You try to raise them right. You create a happy home despite every obstacle facing two mommies. You go to church on Sundays and Tot Shabbat on Friday nights. Yet still they “pick up all kinds of stuff off the streets.” Kody has picked up that boys kiss only girls, and vice versa. (Polizzi, 2014:20)

Media representation of gender non-conforming children also mostly referenced interests. For example, the article “Little Boy Pink: Babies, Clothing, and Gender” states:

Because masculinity is associated with violence on such a large scale, I feel inclined to try to steer my son away from cultural manifestations of maleness, including traditional “boy” clothes and “boy” toys. But polarized gender is so deeply entrenched in North American culture that I find it hard to avoid. I was told by a good friend of mine the other day that Alexi is all boy-that he even has “boy” hair. At six months of age, he has not even received a haircut yet. (Schwartz, 2015:33)

In contrast from the preceding passage, Alexi’s parent openly addresses their awareness of dominant gender socialization and express concern about it. Further, they seek to break the

cycle and socialize their children away from dichotomous gender binaries. Together, the references from both magazines demonstrate *Parents* overrepresentation of children's gender conformity via Sullivan's (2004:123) and Landau's (2009) "elements of heterosexual culture," with all the trimmings of femininity and masculinity, while *GayParentMag* had a more mixed representation of how parents view their children's gender presentation.

#### 5.2.4 *Gender Presentation of the Parents*

I used the code "Gender Presentation of Parents" to distinguish between gender conformity and nonconformity in parents (presented as two categories: conforming and non). *Parents* and *GayParentMag* had roughly equal representations of gender-conforming and gender non-conforming parents. However, *Parents* magazine had references that specifically linked parenting to gender. For instance, one article says:

From the start, the inherently nurturing Lexy has wanted to be the one carrying their child (and the biological mother) and spunky, career-driven Jessica wants nothing to do with that chapter of motherhood—the rest she's excited for, albeit a little nervous. We are rooting for Lexy, a nanny and a youth choir teacher, to get pregnant and fulfill her dream of becoming a mom. (Fierberg, n.d.)

Here, we see Lexy described as having a natural predisposition to wanting to bear a child. She is described as having a job in the line of the gendered line of care work and creativity. Lexy, on the other hand does not conform to these gender ideals, but together this couple reifies heterosexuality in that one partner performs breadwinning and the other performs nurturing. The article highlights the author's preference for the gender-conforming behavior in rooting for Lexy to manifest her gendered destiny of gestational motherhood rather than for both mothers to fulfill their parenting dreams. However, *Parents* also attempts to challenge the gendered scripts in one

article, which is also the only one to include a transgender parent. The article, “Transgender Man Gives Birth to Healthy Baby, Talks Navigating Pregnancy as a Man” states:

While Reese’s hormonal therapy gave him a beard and a deeper voice, his uterus and ovaries continued to function. The process of getting off testosterone hormones wasn’t so different from what most women face when they stop taking birth control before conception...and about five months later, Reese was pregnant. (Hanawalt)

Here, *Parents* emphasizes that it is not just one’s gender identity that is important, but also having the physical markers attributed to that gender. On the one hand, Reese meets the gender criteria of having a beard and a deep voice for being a man. On the other, *Parents* addresses the state of Reese’s organs to prove that he meets the criteria needed to biologically carry a child.

However, the appearance of Reese as one of the few gender non-conforming parents in *Parents* should be met with caution. Consider the following passage appearing in the same article:

Reese insisted that he’s not a pioneer for this issue—that transgender men carry out successful pregnancies more often than people tend to think. The fact remains, though: Terminology surrounding pregnancy is rarely inclusive of the trans community, and Reese has made peace with that.

"It doesn't bother me," he said. "I just accepted that I’m the one doing something unique. I know that most people, like 99.99 percent of people who give birth are women. I can’t really bust into this world and then get mad at them for not really including me. I am the one doing something special. I’m the one who is sort of crashing their party. I thought the

respectful thing to do was accept that the language wasn't always going to include me.”

(Hanawalt, n.d.)

This passage demonstrates that rather than challenging gendered scripts by including gender non-conforming parents, *Parents* includes examples that accommodate rather than disrupt the gendered expectations that only women can give birth.

*GayParentMag* only had one reference that specifically linked parenting to gender, but that reference does challenge gendered scripts. The interview article “Pregnant Butch” states:

A.K.: My objective in Pregnant Butch was to describe the disjuncture between my temporarily feminized state and my masculinity—and to point up ways that I felt the culture pushes the notion of pregnancy as the apex of femininity. I was surprised to discover that pregnancy is such a public identity: people touching you, offering a constant stream of commentary and advice. It involved a type of interaction with the straight world that I didn't normally experience, living as a butch dyke in NYC, where the most that I usually got was being briefly misrecognized as a guy and some occasional street harassment. It was such a strange experience to deal with being treated as a “normal” woman, while not feeling that way at all. I subtitled the book “Nine Long Months Spent in Drag” to get across the gender performance that pregnancy is. (Prince-Sayward, 2016:17)

Unlike the references found in *Parents*, this one openly discusses the gendered expectations of pregnancy. A.K. articulates the challenges she faced as a pregnant gender non-conforming individual. Here, her identity is also accepted. Unlike Reese in the *Parents* article, in the *GayParentMag* article A.K. does not need to explain her credibility by stating her features or biology. Instead, she emphasizes the social treatment of identity during pregnancy.

The remaining gender non-conforming references found in *GayParentMag* refer to how gender non-conformity affects parents' work. Interestingly, the gender conforming parent's in *GayParentMag* bring up the challenges surrounding gender and conformity. Those parents also emphasize the need for the elimination of gendered LGBT parent expectations. For example, in the article "Blending LGBT Families: Two Women with Two Children Each Form a Family of Six," Destiny states:

Lina and I are both very femme; we love make-up, dresses, high heels, purses and all that involved with being a woman. We constantly get the question if we are best friends or sisters. It makes me feel sad sometimes because even in our own LGBT community, we see how people look at us like it is not possible. Many have said that before I was with a man and I didn't feel comfortable, then why would I be with a woman that looks like a woman? I do not care about how others want to live their lives and what preferences they have, but I love women and I admire beauty. I love it when my wife puts on heels and red lipstick and a short dress; she looks sexy but guess what I like to wear all of that too. As Lina says, we love each other and that's what matters. Just because we both wear dresses and make-up doesn't mean we cannot be a family and be happy. So what it means to me is that we need to educate ourselves [the LGBT community] and respect one another.

(Prince-Sayward, 2016:31)

This passage calls for a reevaluation of gender-presentation in parenting expectations. Contrary to a butch and femme couple presentation that mimics heterosexuality, both Lina and Destiny present as femme. Although both women conform to gendered expectations of women, they do not conform to the dichotomous nature of masculine/femme relationships that are found in heterosexuality. Further, Destiny states that preference in presentation is irrelevant, just "love"

and “beauty.” Although there are very few references to gender presentation of parents in both magazines, I noticed a difference in the articles focused on gender conforming versus non-conforming parents in both *Parents* and *GayParentMag*. In *Parents*, we see that the heteronormative script is unchallenged. Parents either replicate the nuclear family, applauding gestational parents as more nurturing, or give voice to complacency in the association between women and childbearing. *GayParentMag* queers dominant narratives of femininity and masculinity. As the above passage shows, Schilt and Westbrook’s (2009) research on subscription to heterosexually dichotomous roles in order to achieve social respectability is flouted by parents like Lina and Destiny.

Although I first thought articles would reference the gendered division of power in ways that mimicked heterosexual couples, there were next to no mentioning of this. In fact, there were no references to this at all in *GayParentMag*, and only 4 in *Parents*. How households were run was only mentioned in abstract terms, such as references to the children getting their homework done and participating in extracurricular activities. Who managed these activities was never mentioned, just that they were components of these families. In these articles, it was the functioning of these household that was most pertinent, not the egalitarian or traditional nature of them.

### **5.2.5 Respectability**

Respectability was a major theme in approximately 1/3 of the articles coded, presented 49 times. This code was not found in *Parents*, particularly because LGBT parents were only mentioned briefly, and their identities were the main feature in such article. *GayParentMag* provided a more in-depth portrayal of LGBT Parents beyond their identities. This isn’t surprising

given the different demographics of each magazine, but still says something about the larger story of these media representations.

Respectability came in various ways. Many articles referenced their upper-middle class lifestyles, their military backgrounds, their lengthy relationships, their charity, their children's many achievements, or even their ability to appeal to conservatives. These were parents whose children visited the president, who fostered special needs children, or who were devout politicians fighting for social change. Although the respectability theme was not present in every article, the families featured were not regular people going through the general motions of parenting, but rather model parents. In doing so, *GayParentMag* presents a bar that is homonormativity set by heteronorms in order to be accepted as worthy of representation, similar to the way religious mentioning's functioned in these articles. Simultaneously, it also builds a bigger picture of these families than simply including an article that briefly acknowledges their existence, as was often the case in *Parents*. For example, the *GayParentMag* article featuring a gay father states:

Rob Scheer is the founder of Comfort Cases, a non-profit organization "providing comfort and support for kids in foster care" throughout communities in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. I spoke with him recently by phone to learn more about his journey first as a child in foster care, then as part of a gay couple trying to adopt, and ultimately as a father, creating an organization that has helped thousands of children in foster care. (Mnookin, 2017:74)

The above example demonstrates the respectable nature of the parents featured. Rob Scheer was not just a gay dad, but led his own profit helping "thousands of children in foster care." Such respectability highlights the prerequisites for many of the parents selected to appear



in *GayParentMag*. The example provided demonstrates one of the more accomplished families, but respectability also appeared in other ways as well.

The other common demonstration of respectability came in the form of religious references. This form of respectability in particular captured references to the importance of religion to these families, specifically Christianity. Sometimes these nods were overt, and at other times they were subtly embedded in an article. For example, one article, a couple is described as “a self-proclaimed “‘Cajian’ family with both Cajun and Filipino heritage along with a strong Christian faith, reside in Louisiana with their three-year-old twins Mia and Collin” (Prince-Sayward, 2015):

GPM: Is there anything else you would like to share with the readers of Gay Parent Magazine?

Christa & Holly: We can’t go without mentioning how faithful God has been. Sometimes I (Christa) can just look back at it all and think, “Now the pain makes sense. It was all because of them.” From experiences, so much time is wasted when harsh words are spoken, and criticism is spewed. Relationship building takes work from both sides. It may be uncomfortable, and each party may just want to throw in the towel, but at the end there is always hope.

In this example Christa and Holly attribute their resilience to God, and not themselves. They use their religiosity to demonstrate their trust in faith, and the meaning of all their experiences are tied into their Christian plight. This article demonstrates a very Christian narrative of patience, hope, and peace in reconciliation. These parents are respectable through their Christianity.

Some articles also featured LGBT parents who simply mentioned they were religious, often for no reason that was directly related to the content presented. All of these articles either

featured references that were associated with Christianity (such as, “No my little angel, you and Papa were wishes that I never thought God would grant me.”) or directly referred to themselves as simply Christian. Christian references occurred 25 times and were present in roughly ¼ of the articles analyzed. If non-religious or families of other religions were featured in these articles, nothing was made self-evident with the exception of one family who practiced both Judaism and Christianity.

References like the one above comply with the dynamic of spirituality as a major force in the family dynamic. This type of reference suggests that these parents are respectable on the premise of abiding to faith, a huge element in heteronormativity. By mirroring the social norm of having faith as nuclear families do, or even more specifically a mainstream one, offers up a type of justification for these families. This religious referencing is even more speculative when it is brought up regardless of being a key part of the narrative. The visual presence of these parents is then based on more than just their identities as parents by instead drawing attention to their ability to conform to mainstream values found heteronormativity. As the next coding theme will show, there is a system of values at play in the visibility of LGBT parents.

#### **5.2.6 *Child-Centricity***

I used the Child-Centricity code whenever articles referenced the needs and experiences of the child over the parents own needs and experiences, whenever children were mentioned as being the fulcrum of the future, or when the sentiment of their lives not having meaning until children became present was expressed. I also used this code whenever authors recommended reproductive/adoption options for parents because these options were often advertised as being the central direction of a parent’s life. For example, one article on adoption states: “The universal truth is that you will change the direction of the life of a child and that your life will be changed

forever” (Illien, 2013;12). These references occurred 10 times in *Parents* and 15 times in *GayParentMag*. For example, one article (*GayParentMag*, 2014) states: “Matt Bomer and his partner, Simon Halls, are raising Kit and twins Henry and Walker. The White-Collar actor recently told DA MAN Magazine, ‘Fatherhood put everything in perspective for me, all paradigms shifted. Having a family is hands down the best thing that ever has or will happen to me.’” This reference was coded for its child-centricity because the parent expressed that having a child was the most significant thing in their life and would remain such.

Child-centricity reproduces heteronormativity via its emphasis on reproduction, or future of mankind that lies within it. Establishing children as the most important social element is central to the debate on whether LGBT individuals should be allowed to marry, procreate, or reproduce in the first place. Homophobia stems from the fear that if everyone was gay and pursued only same-sex arrangements, society as we know it would fail to exist because procreation would no longer be feasible under traditional terms. This same fear views LGBT parents with skepticism regarding their ability to raise children because of what it proposes: if their children are also raised to be LGBT, then the same collapse heterosexuality would occur. To view children as the most central part of the narrative of one’s life reflects the heterosexual value placed on children, the social symbol of the success of our society’s values. Homonormativity in this way is “domesticated and family focused” (Mathers et. al, 2018;936) as long as children as scene as the most central part of one’s existence.

### **5.3 Reproduction**

Of the articles I examined, 16 of the articles in *Parents* and 9 of the articles in *GayParentMag* dealt with the theme of reproduction. Within this theme, the following codes played a key role: Child’s Origins, Parenting Timeline, Child’s origins, Relationship to Parents,

Biological Legitimacy, Sperm as a Commodity, and Samaritan Adoption. First, this section begins with the pathways of reproduction, then family building, the importance of these pathways in conjunction with the process of family and ending with how these pathways are portrayed in the media.

### 5.3.1 *Child's Origins*

I used the code “Child’s Origins” to capture articles that specified the biological origins of a child. This theme was broken into two categories: adopted and biological parents. This included parents who had children from previous relationships, regardless of their context and were included because all parents faced the same attention to the biological origins of the children.

In *Parents*, the adoptive origins of a child were mentioned 4 times (15% of the time), whereas biological parents were referenced 22 times (85% of the time). Thus, even with the limited number of times LGBT parents appear in *Parents*, children’s origins were not only highly referenced, but a child’s biology was referenced 5 times more than in *GayParentMag*. This is contradictory to other messages in articles from *Parents* that offer advice to heterosexual parents on how to be respectful of LGBT parents. For example, one article tackles the question of “Who’s the biological mother?” with:

This is a slightly different question and, in a way, it's correct and clinical. But don't ask about a biological mother because she may not be in the family. The child may have been adopted, or one of the mothers may have carried the baby while the other contributed the egg.

The question is also off-limits because it can imply some quality of mothering: that the mother who gave birth is more of a mother. When our son was 6 months

old, I went to a new physician for my annual exam. At the time, my partner was staying home with our son while I worked full-time. I did the night shift to give her a break, which meant I'd wake up with the baby every few hours. I told the doctor I'd been very tired and I felt like the exhaustion was affecting the quality of the time I was spending with my son. She asked me if I'd given birth to him and when I said no, she nodded knowingly. She implied that I just felt disengaged because I wasn't bonding with my son as much as my partner. I mentally tore up her entire exam room, Godzilla-style. You may have the best intentions asking this question, but please understand why a nonbiological mother might feel a little bit defensive about answering it. (Pintea, n.d.)

Like the above article suggests, asking an LGBT parent about the origins of their child is not politically correct, yet the same magazine features 20 out of 64 articles that ultimately brought up children's origins regardless of whether it was key to the narrative or not. So much so, that out of the 33 individual LGBT parents specified, fictional, celebrity, and nonentity, child's origins were mentioned. Also important is the more frequent representation of LGBT parents who used assisted reproductive technologies to conceive to their children which privileges biological parenting. The overrepresentation of biologically parented children is complicit with the function of homonormativity, because it answers the same questions heterosexual parenting provides (i.e. child's origins), rather than challenging the necessity of needing to know.

Even in a magazine that is geared toward LGBT audiences, there is still a tendency to specify the child's origins and an overrepresentation of genetic parenting, although these numbers are not as stark as what was found in *Parents*. In *GayParentMag* child's origins were

mentioned 58 times (67% of the time). Adoption was referenced 15 times (26% of the time), and biological parents were referenced 43 times (74% of the time). This demonstrates that both magazines reproduce homonormativity by privileging biological parents. Folgerø (2008) suggests that the constant referencing of child's origins is because same-sex parents challenge the heteronorm of procreation. Thus, being complicit in regularly revealing these origins also subscribes to complacency in heteronorms.

### 5.3.2 *Parenting Timeline*

“Parenting Timeline” was a code used for every LGBT family featured to identify the timeline of parenting and outness, and how those themes interacted.<sup>8</sup> The point of this code was to analyze whether or not these magazines held a possible favoritism for parents whose family building process was less complicated. For example, identifying as LGBT early on, marrying, and bringing children into the family in that order would follow the ideal heteronormative script. This code was characterized by three sub-codes: parenting before being out, parenting after being out, and unknown.

“Parenting Timeline” is an interesting code because of how it authenticates the family being presented. For example, parenting after being out implies that one began their family full of intention, choice, and long-term assuredness in their sexual orientation. This includes LGBT individuals who married or entered a relationship before becoming parents, thus being out to family and friends before having children. For example, “One sign lead to another and a year later they find themselves in Maui, signing civil union papers in a beautiful ceremony performed by none other than Michael’s mom! They both live in California now with their three gorgeous

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<sup>8</sup> In some cases, the status of a celebrity’s timeline was verified elsewhere if unmentioned, as it was assumed to be already known by the audience.

children, and how they became parents makes for an even more compelling story.”

(Francesquini, 2013:34-36). Here, a gay couple follows the traditional script of being out, getting married, and parenting in the prescribed order.

Other LGBT parents raised children with prior heterosexual partners (the second of the three sub-codes of this category), met a same-sex partner, and then chose to parent with them. For them an LGBT parent identity is malleable. For example, consider the following passage from the article “A West Virginia Family” in *GayParentMag*:

GPM: How did you and Nicole go about getting your son Isaiah?

Tiana: “Isaiah was brought into the world when Nicole and I had a break; she had gotten back with her ex-boyfriend a few times and a month after she came back to me, she took a test and realized she was pregnant. We had always talked about having a kid, so I told her keep it and we would figure out what to do next.” (Prince-Sayward, 2016:34)

As shown here, the parenting timeline of Nicole and Tiana is not straightforward. These two women did not marry and then intentionally decide to have children. Instead they are a family built on unexpected beginnings and uncertainty. This juxtaposes the homonormative family script mentioned prior and challenges the hetero-nuclear family construct.

Of course, there were occasions unlike either of the above when no timeline was discernable, in which case I placed those articles under the “unknown” sub-code. In both magazines, the number of LGBT families who were parents before coming out were roughly equal to those for whom this timeline was “unknown.” In *Parents* the parenting timeline was unknown in 4 instances, and parenting before being out was present in 5 instances. In *GayParentMag*, the parenting timeline was unknown in 18 instances and parenting before being out was present in 18 instances as well. In *Parents*, 14 parents are presented as becoming parents

after being out, more than three times the number of parents presented as becoming parents before being out. In *Parents*, there were 36 instances of parenting after being out, double the amount of references to parenting before being out. Homonormativity can only be replicated if the parenting began with intention, not on accident, as the decision to come together to parent is the very fulcrum of heteronormativity. As the above findings show, more visibility was given to those that parented children intentionally, and with a clear narrative and a static identity throughout parenting.

### 5.3.3 *Samaritan Adoption*

Originally “Samaritan Adoption was a sub-code of “Respectability” that later became its own theme. This became its own theme because of the specific nature of the representation of most all the adoptions in *GayParentMag*. For example, the *Parents* article describes the adoption of 3 children by a gay couple states:

At the time they met the children Zenada was five years old, Juan was four, and Mario was three. They were all born in the USA and of Mexican descent. They had been in three different foster homes and were in dire need of a permanent family. The kids had had a rough start and things hadn’t gotten much easier until they met the Berry-Berlinskis. Michael describes their situation, ‘Our children were found by CPS pillaging through dumpsters in Watsonville. They were looking for food as their grandmother lay dead from a heart attack in their trailer and their mother was nowhere to be found. It was a very sad situation. (Francesquini, 2013:36-38)

These were not parents who adopted out of their own want to simply parent, but out of virtue. In heteronormativity, having children becomes a social duty, and necessary for the continuation of society. In this same way, these LGBT parents portray themselves as performing



the social duty by rescuing children from otherwise terrible situations. Thus, the goal remains the same, performing a duty for society, rather than individual fulfillment. By portraying LGBT parents who adopt children as rescuers, *GayParentMag* enhances the respectability of the parents it chooses to feature, and the great contributions LGBT parents can give society, rather than portraying LGBT parents who are fulfilling their own personal want to just be parents. These parents replicated homonormativity by performing social duties, rather than individual fulfillment. As with respectability, it could be that this quality is what deemed them worthy of representation in the first place. Additionally, it should be noted that while Biblarz and Savci's (2010) research found that there is a tendency to focus on gay men with biological connections to their children, about half of all adoptions (including Samaritan adoptions) were men.

#### **5.3.4 Biological legitimacy**

"Biological Legitimacy" references emphasize biologically related children in a way that mimics heteronormative procreation and legitimates this standard of family formation. I used this code when a child was specified as having an added legitimacy by way of being biologically parented, or that biological parenting was the most important, if not only goal. These references changed slightly with each magazine, and sometimes were as subtle as unnecessarily mentioning who the child of LGBT parents is biologically related to or emphasizing the function of procreation by way of comments that related themselves to heterosexual parents. In *Parents*, these references occurred 12 times. Take the following example from *Parents*:

When we started searching for a donor, we tried to find someone who resembled me so our child would look like a blend of the two of us. The moment we saw the donor, we knew he was the one for us. He met our physical and ethnic criteria (blue eyes, light hair,

Irish), and we loved the thoughtfulness he put into answering the questions in his profile. (Garrard, n.d.).

This reference adheres to homonormativity because it emphasizes the traditional biological narrative of parenting even though both parents are not actually biologically linked to the child. Still, these parents, like many heterosexual parents, wanted a baby that would produce anticipated physical traits of each other; a blend of the couple's features modeled in their own likeness

In *GayParentMag*, biological legitimacy was referenced half as many times as in *Parents* (7 times), and reproduced homonormativity by emphasizing the desire to have a child with physically similar characteristics to the parent, referring to biological attempts to produce children sometimes as the only considerable option. For example:

When I first talked about it with a friend, they told me to adopt. Now, I understand the virtue of adopting, believe me, but I just couldn't. If I was going to go through all the trouble, I wanted it to be my own. My selfish thinking, however, sort of blew up in my face. Yes, I have a daughter who is my own flesh and blood, but she is a spitting image of her mother, whose darker skin genes clobbered my WASP-Y ones. There is scarcely a physical trait that looks anything like me.

Maybe that was the universe telling me something. She does, however, possess a lot of the emotional traits I myself had as a child. Her "drama" is so calculating and believable I am not so sure she won't one day bring home an Academy Award. It's strange though, because besides that, I sometimes feel like I am helping to raise someone else's child, which is what parents who adopt must feel at times. It's not a bad thing, but part of me (and yes, the narcissistic part) wonders if I would feel more of a connection to her if I

was looking into blue eyes, or if I could see myself in her smile. But the more realistic part of me knows that it doesn't matter, the love between a child and a parent is beyond blood. (Lewis, 2012:14-15).

Here, a gay father describes biological parenting as the only considerable option. His desire to have a child that is his own "flesh and blood" reiterates the heteronormative narrative. Ultimately, this gay father is shocked that his child does not resemble him physically and yearns for physical traits that would allow him to feel "more of a connection to her" instead of feeling like he is "helping to raise someone else's child." The father also acknowledges that the more "realistic" part of him knows that the "love between a child and parent is beyond blood," but nevertheless expresses an added legitimacy in biological parenting, especially when the biological link between child and parent becomes visible. This added legitimacy stems from a narrative of homonormativity, that the best parenting is one that reflects heteronormative parenting, even if other forms of parenting are acceptable.

Children were often used in both magazines to legitimize these families, and not just through biological emphasis. Articles often focused on the children, rather than the parents. For example, in *GayParentMag*, gay dad Rob Scheer states: "I always knew I wanted to be a Dad. Honestly, being a parent was the most important goal I had" (Mnookin, 2017). As this reference demonstrates, Rob's identity comes most centrally through his parental role. References like these reflect homonormativity because of their emphasis on the functional role of individuals, which is to parent children. This ideology aligns with the values of heterosexual families because it still shares the focus of the reproduction of society. These references occurred 10 times in *Parents* and 15 times in *GayParentMag*.

### 5.3.5 *Sperm as a Commodity*

I created two codes to look into the difference between surrogacy and sperm donorship in both *Parents* and *GayParentMag*; however, surrogacy was rarely mentioned/featured as a path to parenthood in both magazines. I attribute this to the higher number of lesbian parents, a failure to mention the means of a child's creation, and a number of gay parents who co-parented or had existing children from a prior heterosexual relationship. The code "Sperm as a Commodity" was used to compare references to sperm donation to the language used for egg donation and surrogacy. Take for example this passage, from a *Parents* article:

Latin singer Ricky Martin always knew he wanted to be a father, so he decided to become a single dad via a surrogate. His twins Matteo and Valentino were born in August 2008. In *Vanity Fair's* Spanish edition, Martin gushed about the surrogate he used, saying, 'I saw the picture and I said: Who is this woman so angelic, so transparent. I would give my life for the woman who helped me bring my sons into this world.' (Tigar, n.d.)

Martin refers to his surrogate in terms of godliness and sacrifice. This is congruent with research that finds that gay fathers ultimately have positive relationships with their surrogates and maintain more contact with their surrogates than egg donors (Blake, Carone, Slutsky, Raffanello, Ehrhardt, Golombok, 2016). However, such terms were not common in references to sperm donors. Take this passage, from the *Parents* article "10 Things You Shouldn't Ask a Lesbian Mom":

Nothing matters about the donor. You have to trust that the parents have checked his health history and whatever else is important to them. The answer to this question will never be, "Well, he's of average intelligence, he said his biggest hobby is napping, and he

donates sperm for pocket money." Choosing a sperm donor was the most nerve-racking, weird, incongruous, depressing, exhilarating, and hope-filled decision we ever made.

Sperm donors are tested for diseases and genetic conditions, and because he won't be a parent, his hobbies, weight, and employment status don't matter. (Pintea, n.d.)

In contrast to the surrogate, who is portrayed as a selfless individual of supernatural character, the sperm donor in these magazines was reduced to a commodity by way of being bought and sold, with little need for personal characteristics. According to these references, what the sperm donor did was a transaction, and what the surrogate did was not.

However, surrogacy is work. It is a transaction between the individuals involved. Both are done for money, and sometimes also out of selflessness. There was a clear gendered difference in who was making the assessment about these forms of donorship which excluded the donors and surrogates themselves. Consequently, women and men discussed their donors and surrogates differently.

This is congruent with the work of Almeling (2011) who finds that sperm donors talk about what they do more so in terms of performing a job, and egg donors talk about what they do in term of providing a gift. Further, "In sperm donor programs, it is acceptable for men to be "donating" for monetary reasons; the recipients are rarely mentioned, and payment is based on bodily performance, with men receiving "wages" each time they produce a "high quality" sample. In contrast, egg donation programs historically grew out of adoption or surrogacy centers and emphasize the importance of women's altruism. These programs focus on the special connection between the donor and the recipient (e.g., "thank you" cards are common) and the donor is paid a lump sum for the process they undertake— not the resulting number of eggs" (Barnes, 2012:687). It is nevertheless impossible to say if this was a theme of LGBT parenting

magazines specifically, as both *Parents* and *GayParentMag* had nearly-equal reference counts (9:7).

Regardless, the emphasis placed on sperm as a commodity, adheres to homonormativity because of its gendered emphasis on procreation as being primarily attached to the mother, not a product of multiple parties. Mothering and giving birth are synonymous with heteronormativity. Women are presented in these references not just as workers, but as performing a labor of love, whereas men are removed from the emphasis of nurturing behavior because women are seen as the only gender capable of *wanting* procreation. The male role in procreation is simply to provide the genetic material to make it possible. References in these magazines, like the example above, reflected these values, and consequently homonormativity because they reflect the gendered attitudes found in heteronormativity.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Both *Parents* and *GayParentMag* simultaneously challenge and conform to homonormativity but do so in distinct ways. Comparatively speaking, both magazines conformed to homonormativity via LGBT identities, child-centricity, and gendered language. The majority of LGBT Parents presented in both magazines held either a gay or lesbian identity, with very little representation of bisexual or transgender parents, making more concise, monosexist identities more visible. Both magazines also used gendered language that reflected this binary, with a stronger use of pronouns that catered to “he,” “she,” “wife,” “mother,” “husband,” and “father,” rather than “they,” “partner,” or “spouse.” There was also a tendency to speak of parents and families in a child-centric way, where the child was presented as being the most crucial part of one’s identity, and not themselves. Still, both magazines challenged homonormativity by calling out homophobia in many of their articles. Prejudice against LGBT parents was not hidden and was highlighted in every parenting topic. In terms of reproduction, both *Parents* and *GayParentMag* did not challenge heteronormativity, including children’s origins, parenting timeline, biological legitimacy, and the commodification of sperm. Children’s origins were almost always mentioned, with heightened visibility to children of biological parents. Most of these parents also became parents after coming out to friends and family, representing a more traditional narrative of parenting where children were consciously brought into the picture than parents who came out after having children. Biological children were also depicted as having an extra element of legitimacy, because they reflected the biology of at least one of the parents, as anticipated in heteronormativity. Lastly, the commodification of sperm places emphasis on mothering by positioning birth as an act done out of love, one that is central to the procreative narrative, and the male role as simply making it a genetic possibility.

*GayParentMag* also conformed to homonormativity in terms of respectability and Samaritan adoption. The families given visibility were not just any families, but ones of outstanding virtue and notoriety. They were politically active, had their own charities, or were dedicated Christians. Their adoptions were also described in heroic terms, as a selfless act to the public. As a result of their complacency with homonormativity and outstanding parenting, the families presented were depicted as particularly worthy of representation. Still, *GayParentMag* did contest homonormativity by offering up more challenging identities and forms of relationships. The families depicted had more unique narratives, and some did act to queer the script of parenthood.

*Parents* conformed to homonormativity by undermining the voices of LGBT parents. Its articles were predominantly written by outsider authors. They were also uncritical of themes like marriage, and gender presentation of both children and parents. Their articles tended to feature gender conformity and less complex relationship dynamics. However, *Parents* did present LGBT parents appropriately within topics, through consideration both to their inclusion with and distinction from heterosexual parents when necessary in all of their articles.

The literature surrounding homonormativity proved significant in that maintain a queer identity as an LGBT parent is truly challenging in a system in which heteronormativity is compulsory (Rich, 1993). The LGBT parents that were given prime visibility were the most stable identities of being gay and lesbian (Rubin, 1992). Both Sullivan and Stacey and Biblarz and Savci were correct. Heteronormative values were produced in gender socialization, but they were also at times less gender-stereotypical (2004;2001). Landau was also correct in that there is a tendency to present children as properly masculine, feminine, and heterosexual (2009). Marriage was also a prevalent feature of homonormative compliance in (Chambers, 2001). Queer families, through these symbols, both reified and disrupted homonormativity.



The gay and lesbian parent literature was also supported. Biblarz and Savci were right in that there was not attention to a distinction in women who loves women (2010). Bisexuality was nearly non-existent. Sullivan's assertion that genetics were the dominant link that attached children to the mothers, and even further, their fathers (2001). Both magazines also showed that conforming symbolic practices of gender in LGBT parents still do possess the ability to challenge heteronormativity (Dalton and Bielby, 2000). Gay men, regardless of their children's origins, still had to act exceptionally to avoid prejudices, by securing their masculinity in addition to their abilities to nurture (Biblarz and Savci, 2010). Lastly, there was a tendency to do gender in a way that "reflects biology" in which women were still presented in highly nurturing contexts, and men had to emphasize their masculinity (Sullivan, 2004).

To answer my research questions, the visibility of LGBT-parented families in *Parents* articles has emerged carefully. These articles hid safely behind the voices of outsider authors and professionals and did not fully portray distinct narratives of specific LGBT parented families. This glossing over and homogenous representation of LGBT parents did not produce enough visibility to fully understand the spectrum of identities and narratives these families provide in comparison to *GayParentMag*. As far as whether these LGBT parented families challenged or conformed to heteronormativity through their media representations, they ultimately did both. However, this was limited again by the homogeneity of the families that were visible, and the ways in which they were presented.

Therefore, limitations to this research must also be considered. The first is that there is simply not enough data to draw more salient conclusions. As parenting magazines continue to bring more LGBT parent visibility to their articles, this can hopefully change in the future. The second limitation to consider is the effects of race and class on LGBT family types. These

demographics do change the structure of what family and queerness can look like. That said, there is not yet enough racial and ethnic diversity in these magazines to add that level of analysis. Lastly, the nature of these data sets is limiting. *GayParentMag* actually produces these articles in print yet has a much smaller window of readership. *Parents* does not print these articles but uses a website platform instead and has a much larger level of readership. Thus, these magazines are bound to look very different by the nature of their set-up. Consequently, my research is preliminary work to be built upon, with these considerations in mind.

Sociologically, the significance of my findings lies in the foundation they lay to understand how gender, sexuality, and family interact with one another in parenting magazines. My research advances the understanding of these interactions within this media platform but can also be used as a basis for performing a queer reading of homonormativity in other media as well. My research should also be considered in editorial goals for future publications featuring LGBT parents' representation. At the very least, it should call into question the ways in which LGBT parents' visibility is still narrow.

If media are such a vast socializing agent as Martin's work shows us, then the consistent representation of homonormativity that was found in these magazines will continue to limit the visibility of LGBT parents. Poole's (2014) work on LGBT visibility has shown us that although there is more representation, the existing representation has its own limitations. However, these magazines have also shown, in their own ways, that they can break that narrative and queer the script of LGBT family. Comparatively, *Parents* and *GayParentMag* will each need to work distinctively to achieve these goals. *Parents* would have to give more detailed attention to LGBT parents, as opposed to merely glossing over them in an attempt to explain them to a heterosexual audience. This spotlighting will not allow for a fully queer script to be written in their articles

until LGBT parents are treated with more distinction, allowed the opportunity to speak for themselves, and given the chance name themselves proudly. *GayParentMag* on the other hand would need to represent families beyond heteronormative respectability politics and allow for a more dimensional representation of LGBT parents without these criteria, like child-centricity, Samaritan adoption, religiosity, and monosexist identities. Otherwise, the continued privileging of more conforming identities will continue to advance the homonormativity of LGBT parental representation.

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